
Rod Blalock

State Representative

33rd District

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A report

from your

representative

Committees:

Criminal Justice and Corrections
Transportation Policy and Budget,
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May 1997

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The last four months in the Legislature have been exciting, frustrating, and rewarding. Although I have been involved in local politics for years, being in the Legislature has opened a whole new world to me. I have always wondered, "Why don't the politicians just sit down and fix our problems?" Well, the answer I have found is that our problems are incredibly complex. There are no easy answers, and the arguments arise from real differences of opinion in how our state should be governed.

Whether it is giving a speech on the House floor, rushing to a meeting with the governor to ask for a veto, or talking with department officials to get background on issues, being your representative is exciting. Working with others to find common-sense solutions to our problems is something that I have always done in my private life and it is what I have tried to do in the last four months in the Legislature.

Many times in the last four months I have driven home, frustrated and wishing that there was more I could do to change things in the legislature. Not being able to give homeowners a bigger tax break, the lack of funding for education and the basic Health Plan, attacks on the Growth Management Act, attacks on poor people and children — they all add up to make my job very frustrating at times.

Fortunately, there are many rewarding moments to balance out the frustration. Passing a tough new juvenile justice reform bill, a welfare reform bill that makes work a first priority, and giving small business some tax relief through the B&O tax rollback are all moments that have made my job worthwhile.

My family is of utmost importance to me and I want to keep a healthy perspective on my job in Olympia. I have commuted from Des Moines every day except two of the legislative session. They are the biggest reason that I am here in Olympia and it is my job to see that what we do in the legislature will make Washington state a better place for all children to grow up.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rod Blalock".

ROD BLALOCK
State Representative



Representative Rod Blalock

Education means opportunity for working families

Education is the door to opportunity for all of Washington's working families and their children. We must continue to strengthen public schools, and we must make higher education and worker retraining more accessible and affordable for those who need it most.

Strengthening public schools

High standards: This session, I opposed efforts to lower achievement standards for middle and high school students for history, civics, geography, arts, health and fitness. **(HB 1606)** I believe that when you expect more of kids, you get more, and that we should not retreat from high expectations. I also supported keeping the *Certificate of Mastery* as a requirement for high school graduation so a high school diploma will truly mean students have learned something in school, not just taken up space. In the future, most kids will earn it by age 16, through tests, samples of their best work, and completion of serious and rigorous projects.

School to work: I opposed eliminating the \$3.1 million school-to-work program, which teaches children the importance of work and the critical role school plays in their future work lives. Now schools will have to cut other programs to maintain these vocational programs for middle and high school students.

Levies and stable local funding: I supported and spoke for **HB 2069**, which allows local voters the option to tax themselves an extra 4 percent for locally-determined school needs. It also provided property tax relief to the poorest school districts — extra state aid to help equalize school spending so that students in the poorest districts receive an education equal to that of students in the wealthiest districts.

Many people are tired of school levies constantly on the ballot, and often vote against them because they feel like they're being "nickel-and-dimed" to death. Another bill that I supported, **HB 2011**, gives

school boards the authority to run four-year school levies, rather than the present two-year system.

Education is the great equalizer

Financial aid is the key that unlocks the college door for many working families. We approved financial aid increases to help nearly 7,300 more working families in each of the next two years. Here's how that 7,300 breaks down:

- Nearly 6,000 more needy students (for a total of 49,000) will get state need grants averaging \$1,400 to help pay for college.
- 735 more students (for a total of 9,635) will get work study jobs to help pay college costs.
- 550 more students who have completed their first two years of college will receive \$2,500 grants to earn their four-year degrees.

The new **Advanced College Tuition Program** offers a ray of hope to working families who earn too much to qualify for college financial aid. The plan enables parents to pay in advance for their children's college education, paying today's prices for tomorrow's tuition. Some call prepaid tuition an empowerment plan for middle-income working families. In other states, the typical purchaser is the two-parent working family earning \$50,000, whose children are now in elementary school.

Workfirst — the new vision of welfare

Passage of the federal welfare reform bill in August 1996 completely overhauled 60 years of welfare law and dictated hundreds of policy changes by the states. The new system, "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)", involves a block grant that gave each state the responsibility and opportunity to design its own approach to problems unique to each state. With three different proposals on the table to start, much debate, negotiating and soul-searching went into producing a plan that is firm, but fair.

33rd District Report

Key provisions of HB 3901 as signed:

Work is the #1 priority — Recipients must make an intensive job search as soon as they receive benefits. Every effort will be made to find them a job. Only if this doesn't work will education and job-training be pursued. Work activities must not displace current workers.

5-year Lifetime Limit — Parents who care for the elderly, or a child under 1 year are exempted from the time limit.

License Suspension — Parents who fail to pay child support can have their license suspended (includes drivers, professional, business, and recreational licenses).

Child Care — Available to all low income workers who earn under 175% of the federal poverty level.

Legal Immigrants — Programs are available to all legal immigrants. Those arriving after August 22, 1996 must wait 12 months prior to becoming eligible.

four caucuses and the governor put together a sweeping reform package which passed both houses unanimously: **HB 3900 includes:**

- Tough new sentences for various crimes make the juvenile system a **real** deterrent to crime.
- Sending the most violent 16 and 17 year-olds to adult court. Older teens would now be sent to adult court for robbery in the first degree, drive-by shooting, rape of a child in the first degree, burglary in the first degree if the teen has a prior record, and any violent felony committed with a firearm.
- Simplifying the juvenile sentencing grid. Allows judges greater discretion in sentencing, including detention for teens who don't yet have long criminal histories, community service, restitution, and mandatory drug and alcohol treatment.
- Providing drug abuse treatment options to counties and the state. Juvenile court judges estimate that fully 75% of teen offenders have drug or alcohol abuse problems.

After years of talking big policy but being unwilling to fund it, the 1997 budget contains funding to implement these critically needed, sweeping changes.

This year's legislative session saw mostly behind-the-scenes action on the third runway issue. Swift timing

and persistent lobbying enabled us to get a gubernatorial veto of several bills that would have made it easier for the runway to be constructed.

After much prodding and pushing we finally got the Department of Ecology to study and formally comment on the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the third runway. Ecology's comments were extensive and raised

Getting tough with violent juveniles

After years of trying to revamp our state's outmoded system of dealing with young criminals, the Legislature this year passed a landmark, bipartisan juvenile justice bill. In the final days of session, all



Rep. Blalock meets with students and alumni of Evergreen High School, his alma mater.

Representative Rod Blalock

33rd District Report

many valid points of contention with the report. I also attended and testified at a public hearing on the SEIS while not one Port Commissioner bothered to attend the meeting.

Release of the Burien Mitigation study highlighted the true cost (\$3 billion dollars!) to the local communities surrounding the third runway expansion. The study, paid for by the state, offers a more realistic cost analysis of the third runway project and will be useful in future negotiations with the Port of Seattle.



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